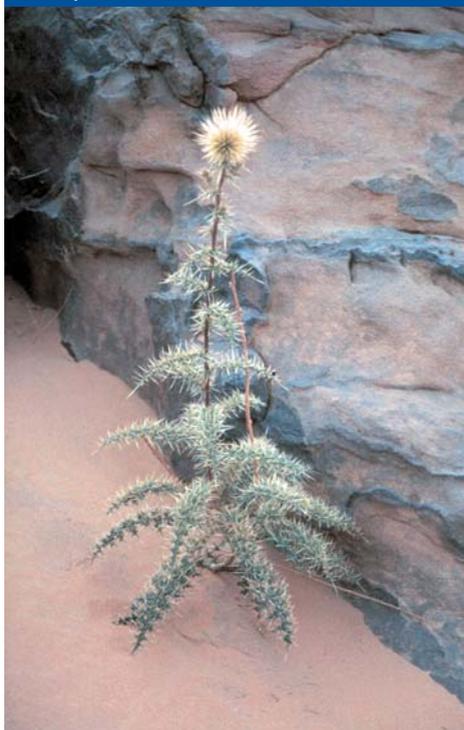


***Echinops spinosus* Turra.**
Compositae (Asteraceae)



Compiled by Dr. Salima Benhouhou

■ **Morphological description**

A perennial herb growing to 1 m. and more, with erect brownish to reddish stems.

A few long leaves, from 10 to 15 cm., hairy, arachnoid and with very long spines. The long skinny stems support round prickly heads. The inflorescence is often a single hemispherical globe up to 5 cm. in diameter during the flowering period. It is surrounded with numerous long spines. The small hermaphrodite flowers that compose the dense head are tubular, turning from green to white and yellowish when in full bloom. The fruits are small achenes topped by membranous scales to ease dispersion.

Flowering takes place in early spring.

■ **Geographical distribution**

Local: Very common in the Algerian Sahara.

Regional: North Africa.

***Echinops spinosus* Turra.**

Echinops spinosus ssp. *bovei* (Boiss.) Maire.

Echinop: from the Greek echinos, hedgehog;

spinosus: with spines, spiniest

Arabic: teskra, chouk el hmir, chouk el djamal, sorr

Targui: téfaryast

English: thorny-headed globe thistle

French: chardon à fleurs globeuses

Global: It is common throughout the Sahara, including the Red Sea region and Sinai.

■ **Ecology**

The plant thrives in desert conditions with an annual rainfall varying of 20-100 mm. and has a wide ecological range for soil. It is found on coastal calcareous dunes, on sandy wadi beds and on gravelly to rocky surfaces where the plant shows an ecological optimum.

■ **Status**

According to the IUCN criteria this saharo-sindian species falls into the "C" category.

Although no problems are reported for the species, human collection near settlement may be a threat in the long term.

■ **Part used**

The roots, and to a lesser extent the stems, leaves and flower heads. The roots are collected in the autumn; the flower heads are picked in the summer. Prepared as a decoction, and as a powder, they are taken internally.

■ **Constituents**

Sesquiterpene lactones, acetylenic elements belonging to the Thiophen type.

■ **Pharmacological action and toxicity**

Efficient action on muscular fibres; antiinflammatory activity; hypoglycaemic properties.

The plant is not reported as toxic by nomads and Tuareg.

■ Pharmacopeias

Not relevant for this species.

■ Pharmaceutical products

Not relevant for this species.

■ Traditional medicine and local knowledge

It is used as an abortifacient and a diuretic, and for blood circulation, diabetes, dysmenorrhoea, gastric pain, haemorrhoids, indigestion, spasmolytic and varicose problems.

The tender part of the flowers is eaten like an artichoke. The plant used to be taken for tinder. It is much appreciated pasture for dromedaries and goats.

In Egypt, the plant is taken to cure diseases related to the circulatory system (a haemostat, a vasoconstrictor for hypertension, varices, varicocele). The stems, leaves and roots are also considered abortive, diuretic and depurative and are taken for liver disease, dysmenorrhoea, metrorrhagia and prostatic problems.

In Morocco, it is mainly used to ease childbirth. A decoction of the roots in either water or olive oil is given to help the woman evacuate the placenta. It is also given before the birth to stimulate contractions.

In Marrakech and Salé, a decoction of the roots is used for stomach pain, indigestion and lack of appetite as well as diabetes. In Casablanca, the entire plant, in a powder or decoction, is used as a diuretic or depurative and to cure liver diseases. Everywhere in Morocco, the plant is used as an abortifacient.

The aerial part of the plant is edible and sold in small bundles in traditional markets.

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